

Cora the Dragon in Hand Puppet Hijinx

Just like countless audition sessions before, Cora had the chance to both size up and intimidate her competition as she waited for her turn to come around. The general call for musicians had summoned a fair share of different animal people wielding various instruments, but none of them seemed to match her style. Probably because she was the last kind of performer someone would want for a children's show.

If any of the other musicians so much as glanced at her, Cora was quick to cast them aside with a glare from her yellow eyes and a snarl to show off the fangs hanging from her draconic maw. Reassured that she had claimed her place as the one person in the group no one should mess with, she leaned back in her seat and let her red-scaled tail lazily slide across the ground. Resting her cheek in her clawed hand, she let her gaze pass over her the torn jeans and black leather jacket that she had deemed perfect for the audition. Even if anyone said otherwise, the dragon woman was prone to lashing out whenever someone dared to critique her style.

“Cora...Bloodsplosion?” called out a voice from the other room. “They're ready for you.”

“About damn time,” Cora grumbled aloud, clasping her claws around the neck of her guitar as she stood up. Stomping her way towards the door with her beloved instrument in hand, she made sure to give one last look at the other performers. Giving them a taste of her ferocity with a hiss that showed off her fangs, she turned back to the room to claim the spot that she assumed was already hers.

On the opposite side of the door was a conference table that seated a number of different board members that represented the television station. They were all different animal people of varying sizes, species, and genders, but all Cora seemed to care about was the one at the head.

Recognizing the Doberman woman's piercing gaze and long ears as belonging to the legendary Breyia Cliff, the dragon lady made it a point to lock eyes with her. Watching the dog lady adorned in dull, grey business suit remain indifferent of her appearance, Cora slammed the door shut behind her and marched forward.

"You're Ms. Cora... Bloodsplosion?" spoke up a nervous lizard man in glasses.

"Hell yeah I am," Cora replied, beating her hand against her chest. "The best metal guitarist the world has ever known."

"You do realize that this audition is for a kid show, correct?" asked an owl man adorned in a bow tie.

"Yeah, got a problem with it?" Cora said, making the owl shudder in his seat.

"We're merely curious about your intentions," Breyia spoke up, seemingly unfazed by the aggressive display.

Cora grinned. "What a better time to teach little brats what good music sounds like then when they're first starting out? Not like any of those second rate musicians outside are going to do anything more than give them bad taste."

"N-now listen here," spoke up a shivering penguin woman. "T-this behavior isn't really becoming of a children's entertainer. I-I'm sorry, but I must ask you to leave before we call security to--"

"That won't be necessary," Breyia said with a wave of her hand. "After all, Ms. Bloodsplosion seems to have something she wants to show us." Turning away from her subordinate, she turned back to meet Cora's grin with a toothy smile of her own. "You may proceed."

Grabbing the black guitar covered in far too many skull decals, Cora did what she did best and began to play. Lightning fast riffs filled the room with an uproar that could be heard far and wide. The thought was passed amongst the group how she was able to play so loudly without an amp. That and many other questions behind the performer's actions were swept aside as the dragon woman began to belt out guttural death screams that spoke of blood waterfalls, raging fire, and ancient gods.

Cora's impromptu metal performance had the response she expected. Any of the businesspeople watching were either clenching their hands against their ears, watching on in abject horror, or both. Regardless, she continued to play as fast as her claws would move. So caught up in her own appreciation of her own talent, she barely managed to hear the soft applause once she ended the finale with one last strum.

"Quite the marvelous display," Brea said, continuing to applaud in spite of her companions' less than favorable reactions. "At first I thought you were merely boasting, but you've proven yourself more than capable of impressing me with your skills."

"Damn straight," Cora said, wiping the sweat from her forehead. "I've auditioned for hundreds of places since leaving my band, but you seem to be the only person that doesn't have their head shoved up their ass."

"I'll take that as a compliment," Brea replied.

"So, I got the gig?"

"Yes," the dog woman replied getting up from her seat. "However, there are some conditions that need to be met in order to make you fit to broadcast on our show."

Cora's smile quickly turned into a snarl. "The hell are you going on about? What, you want me to change my clothes into some dainty dress or something? You'll have to take this jacket away from my cold, lifeless hands."

"No nothing like that. The reason I want you is exactly because of your aggressive style and appearance," Breyia replied, waking over to the dragon woman with a thick stack of papers in her hands. "All I need you to do is sign this contract and you'll be on the show." Reaching into her pocket she retrieved a pen and held it out to Cora. "Now I highly recommend reading it thoroughly before signing. It has some very specific clauses regarding--"

"Don't have to ask me twice," Cora said, snatching the pen out of the business woman's hands and hastily scribbling down her name. "Now when's my first paycheck? I don't have long before the bank repossesses my--"

A loud clank echoed through the room as the pen fell from Cora's hands. Looking away from Breyia's unsettling grin, the dragon woman witnessed her fingers losing their ferocity as they became thin, and her claws turned dull. Reaching out with her other hand to figure out what was going on revealed that it was going through the same process of replacing her scaly hide with a soft, felt-like material.

"What the hell is going on!?" Cora shouted out, looking between the dog woman piercing gaze and her own arms shrinking down to better match her softened hands.

"We're just making the necessary modifications to ensure you're a good fit for your new role," Breyia replied, nodding her head approval as the changes hit the dragon woman's torso to make it appear that her inner organs had been replaced with stuffing. "Allow me to welcome you to the set of Hand Puppet Hijinx."

“You bitch!” Cora shouted out, trying to sound intimidating even as her tail became nothing more than a flap of fabric. “If you think you’re going to change me into some puppet freak then you-“

Cora’s tirade was put on hold as she flopped forward onto the ground. Poorly lifting herself up upon her felt limbs, she looked back to see if one of the board members had tripped her. Instead, what she saw was that everything below her waist had disappeared to make way for a large hole that reached up into her transformed body.

The dragon woman’s screams of fury and fear were silenced as her head became overwhelmed by the cloth curse. Though her mouth hung open, no voice or even a growl could pass by her soft, rubbery teeth. She managed to clasp her face with her fingers to feel her sewn-on eyes before the digits stopped listening to her at all. Though she could still see through her button pupils, that was about all she could do as the rest of her body went limp.

Cora’s view of the ground was changed as a giant hand lifted her up into the air. It was from her unusual perch several feet above the table that she saw that the board members were fifty times larger than her. She soon realized what was actually going on as her captor tilted her head down to see her guitar lying on the floor.

Only a few moments were granted for the dragon woman to deal with her status as a hand puppet that was no more than a few inches tall. Her chance to cope ended when Breyia took it upon herself to slide her hand into Cora’s opening. Unable to resist the waggle of the dog woman’s fingers, Cora was forced to move her felt limbs to meet Breyia’s whims.

“Excellent craftsmanship as always,” spoke up the owl man from before.

“Thank you, but we need to put our star through a test run first,” Breya replied, turning Cora over so that her button eyes could look up at her. “I take it you have our other actors ready?”

“Yes mam,” the lizard man spoke, he and several other members producing similar hand puppets from below the table along with a makeshift stage.

“Excellent,” Breya said, joining the others by kneeling on the ground and putting her living puppet in the center of the display. “Then let us begin.”

“Hey there boys and girls,” Cora spoke, the words flowing from her maw on their own as Breya flapped her mouth up and down with a flick of her fingers. “I hope you’re ready for a fantastic show from the one, the only, Cora Blood-“

Breya paused for a moment to scratch her chin with her free hand. “I suppose that’s a little too much for a children’s show.”

“Perhaps we can use her real name instead of her stage one?,” the penguin woman suggested.

“Ah an excellent idea,” Breya responded, signaling the others to get into position.

“I’m the fantastic Cora Loveflower,” Cora was forced to speak; her internal screams about using her real name going unheard by her captors. “And I’m here to teach you about something near and dear to my heart: dental hygiene.”

Right on cue, one of the other “actors” leaned over to hand Cora a guitar made out of pipe cleaners and glitter. Grasping at the fake instrument with her soft hands, the dragon puppet clumsily strummed along to create a song. While the riffs sounded similar to her routine, they carried with them a series of lyrics that made her skin crawl. Every utterance of the importance

of fighting tooth decay by brushing twice a day made her wish she could bite the hand currently inhabiting her body.

As the song finished and Cora's felt fingers gave one last strum on the guitar, the other board members broke out into applause. The sound of appreciation was something that the dragon woman had forgotten about ever since her last, disastrous show. Even if it was through the humiliation of being used like a toy, she had to admit she still enjoyed basking in the attention of an adoring crowd.

"I say that went rather well," Brea said, turning her hand over to directly speak to Cora. "You're just the breath of fresh air we need to liven up the program and really help kids with their early education. This will show those uppity assholes at channel five who really runs things." Grabbing at the puppet's hand, she gave it a small shake. "Welcome to show business, Ms. Loveflower."